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ABSTRACT

Business leadership is playing a vital role in the success of New Directions, Delaware's comprehensive effort to improve its education system. Through New Directions, business leaders are supporting higher academic achievement for all Delaware students. Four curriculum frameworks commissions, each of which is co-chaired by a practicing Delaware teacher and a higher education or business expert, developed statewide academic standards by identifying and articulating the critical skills that graduates need to be successful in the workplace and in life. Other ways in which business leaders have contributed to New Directions are as follows: multiyear financial investment; increased local control and accountability; and support of choice and charter school programs. New Directions has yielded many lessons for public engagement, including the following: recognize and incorporate public concern and enthusiasm; keep the message simple; encourage peers to spread the word about reform; engage in hands-on, continuous lobbying efforts; and develop strategic communications plans. Long-range support for New Directions has taken the following forms: connecting academic achievement and workplace success; ongoing evaluation; technical assistance; lobbying support; public engagement; and personal support. (The four curriculum frameworks commissions' addresses are provided along with contact persons for each. Contains 17 references.) (MN)

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ED 424 394

FROM THE

Boardroom

The Business Role in Improving Education in Delaware

TO THE

Blackboard

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The BCER would like to thank Mary Rowley for her assistance in writing this brochure.

As part of the "Successful Strategies" brochure series, this BCER brochure attempts to provide business leaders and coalitions with information and resources they can use to support academic achievement in their own communities. For more information about the "Successful Strategies" brochure series or to inquire about additional BCER resources, please contact Karen Larson (202/289-2903) or Shannon Dunphy (202/289-2918) at the National Alliance of Business.

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Business Paves the Way for New Directions in Delaware

Business leadership is playing a vital role in the success of **New Directions**, Delaware's comprehensive effort to improve its education system. Business leaders recognize that Delaware's future depends on all students being able to achieve to their highest potential. Emerging technology, the globalization of competition, and the spread of high performance work practices require students to master more advanced academic skills than ever before to be successful on the job. Like their counterparts in other states, however, Delaware business leaders had begun to see a pattern in recent years of high school graduates who were not keeping up with workplace skill demands. In a 1992 survey of Delaware employers, the majority reported inadequate performance from high school graduates in a number of basic areas. One local firm reported attracting 684 applications for entry-level jobs, but quickly pared the list to 120 because the other 564 could not fill out the application form.

Because workplace skill demands have changed so rapidly in recent years, Delaware's business leaders realized they needed to do a better job of articulating the importance of high academic achievement that reflects workplace skill requirements. They expressed an enthusiastic willingness to work with educators, parents, students, and community leaders to close the skills gap between the knowledge students possess and the skills the workplace demands.

Through **New Directions**, business leaders are supporting higher academic achievement for all of Delaware's students. The business community played a crucial role in developing statewide academic standards by identifying and articulating the critical skills that graduates need to be successful in the workplace and in life. Four Curriculum Frameworks Commissions, each co-chaired by a practicing Delaware teacher and a higher education or business expert, developed the standards over a three-year period. As co-chair of the commission to develop science standards, DuPont's senior executive for research enabled the group to discuss Japan's science standards with Japanese educators and benchmark the committees' work against these standards. The business community again played a key role in designing and establishing statewide assessment methods to measure student performance against the new standards.

Promoting Academic Achievement: the Business Role

Through every stage of **New Directions**, the business community has offered a wealth of expertise and resources and encouraged broad-based public involvement. Delaware's Business/Public Education Council (BPEC), made up of CEOs from Delaware's major corporations and key members of the public education community, is serving as the primary conduit for channeling the business community's momentum to improve education. Prior to the **New Directions** initiative, the BPEC commissioned and released in 1993 two important documents. The *Early Education and Social Services* Report explores social factors that disadvantage youngsters during early childhood, as well as strategies for improving aid to these children. The *Benchmarks of School Performance* Report analyzes Delaware's public schools' performance against the nine components of successful schools identified by The Business Roundtable. Building upon this expertise, business leaders have contributed in essential ways to **New Directions**, including:

- **Integration of Academic Standards into Curriculum** - In 1996, a state task force that included business leaders examined how the newly established academic standards should impact high school graduation requirements. Based on the task force's report to the State Board of Education, additional academic requirements were added in mathematics and science, and total credits will be raised from 19 to 22 over a four-year period. Additional credits in areas such as computer literacy and the arts also are being considered.

- **Multi-year Financial Investment** - In addition to offering time and expertise, the business community agreed to provide start-up funding for a research and development center on education at the University of Delaware. The $6 million, to be provided over five years, will be used to support the reform agenda. This contribution is matched by $5 per child from local school districts and $7 per child by the State Board of Education.

- **Increased Local Control and Accountability** - The Education Improvement Commission — composed of business leaders, educators, legislators, and concerned citizens and chaired by BPEC members — was appointed by the Governor in 1994 to develop strategies for putting authority and accountability as close as possible to where learning takes place, optimally at the school level. To encourage the success of this effort, the business community is helping educators find more efficient ways to operate schools.

- **Support of Choice and Charter School Programs** - Delaware's business community was directly involved in shaping and supporting public school choice and charter school legislation bills, both of which passed the General Assembly in 1995. A math and science academy charter school at Wilmington High School, sponsored by DuPont, Zeneca, and ICI Americas, was opened in the 1996-97 school year.

Engaging the Public in Improving Student Achievement

The processes of standards-based education reform are essential to ensuring a successful product. In Delaware, all stakeholders, including opponents, were continually encouraged to participate in the development work. This inclusive approach paid off for the state's efforts.

Both Delaware's business and education partners agree that "selling" the reform is essential, as is ongoing communications to engage the public. Reform efforts must have networks of supporters who can identify and build understanding across the state, especially with parents and citizens. The essential endorsement of teachers drives public acceptance significantly.

At a minimum, Delaware educational leaders stress, early buy-in from classroom teachers, administrators, superintendents, and school board members is vital for success.

Understanding public opinion regarding educational improvement strategies is another crucial component for success. Baseline public opinion research was conducted in Delaware through the Education Research and Development Center at the University of Delaware to find out not only what people thought about education, but the source of their information.

The results drove the state's public engagement efforts. In Delaware, the majority — 52 percent — learn about school issues from local newspapers, followed by 39 percent who get that information in newsletters. Follow-up polls gauge public reaction to reform efforts throughout the process.

Lessons for Public Engagement

- **Recognize and Incorporate Public Concern and Enthusiasm -** Focusing on topics of public concern will strengthen the ties between the public and schools, as well as increase the chances for long-term sustainability of the reforms.

- **Keep the Message Simple -** It became clear at the end of the second year of Delaware's initiative that the systemic alternative was simply too complex to communicate and achieve in the short term. Reformers instead narrowed the focus to the importance of standards as the academic cornerstone of Delaware's reform agenda which would fortify other reform efforts.

- **Get Out from Behind a Desk** - The State Superintendent and State Board members visited local school board meetings throughout the state, and Governor Carper held statewide education town meetings around Delaware. Communication meetings with education leaders, legislators, and the press were held in Delaware as issues arose, providing forums for discussing education needs, perspectives, and possible solutions. Business leaders hosted these meetings over a breakfast or lunch.

- **Encourage Peers to Spread the Word about the Reform** - Cadres from schools across the state — each including a teacher, administrator, and parent representative — were created to become knowledgeable about **New Directions** and act as local liaisons. A "tool kit" for principals was developed to help them deal proactively with the media, contact their legislators, and develop a local newsletter if one did not exist. A newsletter template was included, along with monthly theme stories, such as updates on content-specific activities.

- **Engage in Hands-on, Continuous Lobbying Efforts** - Directed lobbying efforts toward the Legislature, educators, and the public were essential. Delaware's efforts were sustained continuously, starting prior to the legislative session that would determine the future of the initiative and continuing through the end of the legislative session.

- **Develop Strategic Communications Plans** - Beginning early and revising plans continuously was critical. In Delaware, this included public meetings and distributing information — in layman's language — about **New Directions** in school and public libraries. It also involved getting Delaware's largest newspaper to print the standards statewide in their entirety — including examples of classroom activities that would bring the standards to life. The state's cable television stations also produced and broadcast a four-part series on **New Directions** with live viewer call-in.

Above all, Delaware leaders advise, the business and education communities together must stay the course and recognize that engaging public support is a long-term undertaking.

The Road Ahead:

The Business Community Digs In

Business leaders in Delaware have become deeply and directly involved in public education improvement, and consider the whole process to be an ongoing commitment. Long-range support has taken many forms:

- **Connecting Academic Achievement and Workplace Success** - Business continues to play a key role in helping students understand the connection between academic achievement and workplace success. As a part of **HIRE Education**, Delaware businesses are providing fax machines to all high school guidance departments to enable schools to respond quickly to requests for student transcripts as part of the hiring process. (See Action Profile on page 6)

- **Ongoing Evaluation** - With funds contributed by the business community, the Education Research & Development Center was launched in 1993 at the University of Delaware to serve as an independent evaluation arm for Delaware's academic standards, instructional materials, and assessments. The Center will also conduct public opinion research vital to future reform efforts.

- **Technical Assistance** - The BPEC provided the Governor's Office with a loaned executive for two years to help establish the family centers recommended in the early childhood report, as well as develop strategies to improve the current service delivery.

- **Lobbying Support** - The Delaware business community has played, and will continue to play, a pivotal role in the success of **New Directions** through its lobbying support.

- **Public Engagement** - The BPEC provided vital funds for developing a public awareness information kit. This kit is used in establishing and training local groups who act as liaisons between the public and education reformers.

- **Personal Support** - Top CEOs have articulated their commitment to education reform to state legislators, adding political momentum to reform efforts.

Most importantly, Delaware companies are institutionalizing education reform efforts. In many businesses, support for education reform no longer depends on the leadership of a particular individual; instead, support for education is company policy. "We view education reform in Delaware as a marathon, not a sprint," explains Richard W. Vague, chairman of First USA Bank and chairman of the BPEC.

ACTION PROFILE:

HIRE Education: Employers Make Academic Achievement Count

Educators and business leaders established the **HIRE Education** partnership to increase the credibility and impact of the high school diploma. "**HIRE Education** encourages educational excellence by bringing the high school transcript into the hiring process. Programs such as this help students understand the connection between their work in school and their success in the work environment," said John Gray of PPG Industries and chair of the Business/Industry/Education Alliance (BIE) committee that developed this initiative.

By reviewing high school transcripts, traditionally not a part of the hiring process, employers will be able to select applicants with demonstrated success in areas employers feel are important in their workplaces, including attendance, punctuality, initiative, and skills. Students will be motivated to excel academically when they see academic achievement rewarded by employers.

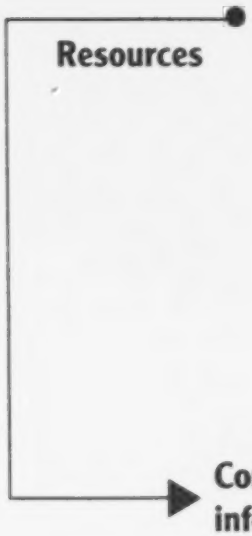
HIRE Education encourages employers to review transcripts by establishing a system for securing transcripts quickly, easily, and at no charge. Each of the state's 19 school districts has agreed to:

- Respond to employers' requests for transcripts within 48 hours whenever possible;
- Inform students that transcripts may be reviewed; and
- Host presentations by **HIRE Education** employers about the importance of obtaining skills necessary for workplace success while in school.

To enable schools to respond quickly to transcript requests, Bell Atlantic Delaware, PPG Industries Inc., and CITICORP have donated enough fax machines to the BIE Alliance to give one to every public high school guidance department in the state.

Employers who join the partnership agree to:

- Promote the importance of high school completion, performance, and attendance;
- Request and use high school transcripts in the hiring process;
- Keep transcript information confidential; and
- Advance the program by making presentations to schools encouraging other businesses to join the partnership.



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The BCER, a coalition founded and managed by the National Alliance of Business, is comprised of 13 national business-led organizations working in partnership with 350 state and local education organizations to improve academic achievement for all students by supporting and expanding business involvement in education at the national, state, and local levels. The BCER supports efforts to: (1) raise academic standards for all students; (2) ensure standards reflect the knowledge and skills needed for workplace success; and (3) help the public understand the critical need for world-class academic standards and necessary changes for school systems to deliver them. Members include: American Business Conference, The Business Roundtable, Business-Higher Education Forum, Chamber of Commerce of the United States, Committee for Economic Development, The Conference Board, Council on Competitiveness, The Council of Growing Companies, National Alliance of Business, National Association of Manufacturers, National Association of Women Business Owners, U.S. Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, Utility Business Education Coalition.

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